

World War I Memorials in the Barossa: Markers of Identity Shift and Dissonance

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Abstract

In South Australia's Barossa Valley, war memorials link regional identity and national politics as well as commemorating the dead. Settled by German Lutherans in the 1840s, the Barossa today is a close knit regional community, with a publicly projected image of a distinctively Australian region with German and English antecedents. But the history of the region has not always been one of cross-community harmony, and on closer examination there have been periods of significant disharmony, especially around the two World Wars of the twentieth century. The war memorials are now seen as reflections of the whole community's commitment to fighting for Australia and the British Empire, but at the time they were erected they represented complex social and political agendas of citizenship and loyalty, acceptance and suspicion.

When Australia joined Britain to fight Germany in World Wars I and II, the Barossa German communities were suspected of disloyalty and persecuted, although Barossa men from German families fought and died with the Australian armies. War memorials in most of the regions have deeply significant local meaning, because they represent the community's assertion of Australian identity. A brief examination of World War I memorials and Honour Rolls in two Barossa towns, Tanunda and Angaston, illustrates some of the ways in which these communities responded to the war and identified themselves as loyal Australians.

Although Angaston and Tanunda are only about 12 kilometres apart, their settlement histories and ethnic composition are very different. Tanunda was the centre of German Lutheran settlement in the Barossa, while Angaston was home of the influential Angas family and was settled mainly by English emigrants. The financial support of George Fife Angas brought the first German colonists to South Australia, and underpinned their settlement in the Barossa district. Settlers of German cultural origin have formed a significant part of the Barossa's population since the first arrivals at Bethanien (Bethany) in 1842 and Langmeil in 1843. More German settlers arrived through the nineteenth century, for a variety of reasons.

In the Barossa, many of the German settlers were small farmers living in and around little settlements, centred on a Lutheran church. The town of Tanunda was the main centre of the Barossa's German population, and the 'great majority' of its population were identified as German in the 1909 *Cyclopædia of South Australia*.¹ Nuriootpa, and Angaston were a mixture of German and English communities, and Angaston was, and is still, known as the most English of the Barossa towns. Religion, ethnicity and language are all-pervasive cultural elements that are amongst the most significant causes of dissonance within and between communities² and these factors were all active in distinguishing the Barossa's German descendants from the English-

¹ H T Burgess (ed), *The Cyclopædia of South Australia*, 1909, vol II, 320.

² JE Tunbridge and GJ Ashworth. *Dissonant Heritage* Chichester, 1996, 72-6

Australian society that characterised South Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Before World War I, South Australia's German communities regarded themselves as culturally German Australian citizens³, but when Australia declared war on Germany in 1914, the secure world of the German community in South Australia fell apart. While those of German descent saw themselves as Australian, those of British descent saw themselves as British and the German settlers as aliens.

Men of English and German descent fought in the Australian forces against Germany during the war, and are recognised together on war memorials in all the Barossa towns. The processes involved in creating these memorials, and the names listed on them, reflected the inter-community conflict during the war. Tanunda, as the centre of German settlement and culture in the Barossa, experienced most conflict and this is reflected in its memorials of the 1914-1918 War. .

The close connection between memorialisation, heritage and identity is clearly evident in the war memorials in the Barossa, where the community was divided by ethnicity. The war memorials in the German communities of the Barossa can be seen as reclaiming their right to be viewed as loyal citizens of Australia and the Empire after their alienation during the war years.

In Angaston, as in many other Australian communities, the process of memorialising the dead was well underway by 1916. The town had agreed on a design commissioned by the Angas family, for a war memorial and had begun to maintain an honour roll of war dead.

In Tanunda, where the German elements of the community were suspected of (at least) sympathy with Germany, the processes of memorialising were much more complex. Here, establishing an Honour Roll was not discussed until mid-1918. While the men's committee's in the town negotiated the place and nature of Tanunda's official war memorial, the women's organisations went ahead on their own and raised money for the Women's Memorial (a stone cross) which was unveiled in February 1920. Six out of the eight men named as having died in the war had German surnames. The official Tanunda Honour roll, unveiled in the Institute building in 1921, lists the names of all those who served as well as those who died. The list of dead here contains twice as many names as the Women's Memorial.

The explanation for this discrepancy in the numbers of Tanunda dead appears to be that the official memorial collected the names of any man who had had any association with Tanunda at any stage of his life, while the women of the town knew whose husbands, sons and brothers had been killed and these were the men they included on their memorial.⁴

Analysis of the names of those who served and those who died shows that about half the men on the Tanunda lists were German, but that a surprisingly small number of them identified themselves as Lutheran. In Angaston, by comparison, the names are

³ Ian Harmstorf and Michael Cigler *The Germans in South Australia*, Melbourne, 1985

⁴ Sources used for this research are the records of the Australian War Memorial and the Australian National Archives.

overwhelmingly English, and most men identified themselves as belonging to one of the non-Conformist Christian sects (Congregational, Baptist, Methodist). Earlier studies of German-Australian communities' contributions to World War I have used Lutheranism as an indicator of German family connection, but for the men listed on the Barossa war memorials, family name gives a much higher rate of accuracy that is still an under-estimate. War records also indicate that the men of German descent were moving away from obvious German cultural association by choosing to affiliate themselves with protestant churches other than the Lutheran church which had formed the focus of Barossa German cultural life before the war..

The Angaston Honour Roll includes the names of most of the men listed in Nuriootpa as well. The Angaston and Tanunda rolls both include the names of many men who did not live in these towns when they enlisted. It appears that the net was cast as widely as possible to boost the impression of patriotic contribution from each of the towns. Further research is required to tease out the reason for inclusion of individuals on the different lists.

The war memorials and Honour rolls in these ethnically diverse towns offer an insight into some of the political and social changes undergone by the German descendant communities in the Barossa.

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